

# UNIMA Bulletin



allenges Malawi



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## Witness the connection with excellence

When the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) released the results of enrolment into public universities early in July this year, they also shared, with university institutions, some statistics regarding student preference in terms of programmes of study and institutions. These statistics make for interesting reading, and are part of the reason why we at UNIMA tend to make quite a lot of noise in praise of our institution. Unsurprisingly, the majority of applicants from Malawi desire to enrol with the University of Malawi, with the other public institutions trailing behind. This is not an opinion, but a statement of fact based on data easily obtainable from NCHE.

- Out of the most popular 10 programmes applied for, 5 are from UNIMA.
- Unsurprisingly, again, out of the 10 least popular programmes, there is not even one from UNIMA.
- UNIMA absorbed the majority of the successful applicants (25%), with the remaining eligible candidates being shared among the other universities.

The numbers don't lie.

But why is UNIMA so popular?

The answers are many. However, this *Bulletin* gives a glimpse at the reason many young Malawians wish to connect with excellence. Among the stories we have featured within this publication are those showcasing the excellence of our students in various competitive activities within the country and beyond. Our Law students, for example, recently travelled to Geneva, Switzerland, where they took part in the finale of the 15th Nelson Mandela World Human Rights Moot Competition. Another student from UNIMA recently emerged as the winner of the Malawi Bureau of Standards Essay Competition. As if that was not enough, yet another student wrote the winning essay of the SADC Tertiary Schools Essay Competition. The successes keep coming, and they serve as testimonies to the superior calibre of UNIMA students.

Across the country and beyond, our prospective students read these stories. The stories speak for themselves, letting the world know which higher education institution is connected to excellence in all areas. It is no wonder that UNIMA continues to be overwhelmed with applications from eager young minds desiring to walk its corridors.

The sad part of the narrative is, much as we would like to, the University of Malawi

cannot absorb all those who wish to join us without compromising the quality of learning at the institution. However, there is light on the horizon. For the past few years, as NCHE can testify, UNIMA has been steadily increasing the enrolment of students. Additionally, the institution is in the process of rolling out programmes that will be delivered using the online mode, exclusively. This will translate into increased enrolment, which is good news for all.

As the new academic year is approaching, and the University is expecting its students on campus on 18th September 2023, a significant number of first-year students are equally excited to connect with excellence and walk through the corridors of the University that God loves the most.

### EDITORIAL TEAM:

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(Chief Editor)

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Mr Gervasio Manyungwa

Ms Lawrencina Kapina



*The Vice Chancellor (left) exchanges MoU documents with Dr Jeff Bordes, CEO of Astria Learning*

## A Visionary Partnership for Quality Learning: UNIMA signs MoU with Astria Learning

On July 27th, 2023, the University of Malawi signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Astria Learning, a United States of America-based EdTech organisation. The primary goal of this MoU is to provide easy access to education, whereby the University of Malawi will be delivering short courses, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, through the Astria Learning platforms. An eCampus will be created to host all content related to the online programmes in partnership with Astria Learning. Astria Learning, which was founded in 2009 by Dr. Jeff Bordes, is available in 17 countries, encompassing over 300 universities, making it a comprehensive platform for education across various nations.

The MoU signing function was held at the University of Malawi Office, and was graced by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Samson Sajidu. Other members present were the University Registrar, Mr. Martin Matululu, the Acting Deputy Registrar, Mr. Alfred Iteta Banda, and the Director of Finance and Investment, Mr. Enoch Njiwa, along with all Executive Deans of the five schools within UNIMA, as well as other staff members.

During the opening ceremony, Professor Sajidu expressed his gratitude to the CEO of Astria Learning, Dr. Jeff Bordes, for considering the University of Malawi as a beneficiary of the e-learning platform. He further stated that the platform would enhance easy access to education, break physical barriers, and bring opportunities for the University of Malawi students to interact with international colleagues, learning about each other's cultures. This, in turn, will help the University of Malawi to gain further international visibility.

The Vice Chancellor also mentioned that the signing of this MoU perfectly aligns with the Malawi 2063 agenda and the University of Malawi's (UNIMA) 2022-2026 strategic plan. The university aims to increase access to education, and this MoU is a significant step towards achieving that vision.

In an interview with Dr. Bordes, he explained that Astria Learning has a digital library with a wide variety of reading materials easily accessible to students. He stated that as one way of enhancing easy access to education, Astria Learning will provide laptops and Astria tablets at

an affordable price, making it easier for Malawians to attend online classes.

During the ceremony, Professor Sajidu and Dr. Bordes signed the MoU, and there was a presentation of gifts from the University of Malawi to the Astria Learning guests. The ceremony continued with a university tour, during which the Astria Learning team admired the UNIMA campus. The day concluded with dinner at Sunbird Ku Chawe.



*The VC takes the Astria Learning delegation on a tour of the UNIMA campus*

## Contractor ready to start work on prefab classrooms



*UNIMA management with the contractor at the proposed site*

The University of Malawi, being an institution that enrolls high numbers of students, has often faced the problem of securing space for the conducting of lectures. To maintain the conducive learning environment enjoyed by its students, UNIMA, with

funding from the Government of Malawi under the Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP), recently awarded a contract to Built Environs Limited contractors to provide prefabricated classrooms to the campus.

The project involves the construction of two prefabricated classrooms capable of accommodating 1088 students in total. The contractor is expected to complete work on 31st January 2024.

On 10th July, 2023, UNIMA Management, represented by Mr Kumvenji Lamba, Assistant Registrar (Administration), met with the contractor for signing of legal documents and for the official handover of the site where the classrooms shall be placed. During the handover ceremony, Mr Kumvenji Lamba, Assistant Registrar (Administration), congratulated Mr. Benjamin Katola, the Managing Director of Built Environs Limited, for their success in securing the project. He further applauded the contractors for the consistently excellent work they have done on some other projects at the university.

In response, Mr Katola expressed his appreciation to the University Management for entrusting them with the task and expressed assurance that Built Environs Limited would complete the construction within the expected timeframe.

UNIMA currently has an undergraduate student population of over 10000 students.

## Zomba City stakeholders for improved student welfare

In a bid to improve students' safety and campus learning experiences, the University of Malawi organized a Zomba City stakeholder engagement meeting, which was held from 16-17 August, 2023 in Liwonde.

Director of Students Affairs at UNIMA, Dr. Jonas Mwatseteza, organised the meeting, whose participants were drawn from Traditional Authorities Mwambo and Chikowi. The University campus, as well as private student residences, are located within the areas of these chiefs. The meeting was attended by representatives from various sectors of the city, including Community Policing, District Social Welfare, UNIMA Students Representative Council, the business community, chiefs, landlords, the Zomba Mental Hospital, as well as university faculty and technical staff.

Opening the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Samson Sajidu, advised members to openly and freely speak out on the positive and negative matters that affect UNIMA students' welfare and campus learning experiences. He said that his expectation was that the meeting would propose

strategies on how the wellbeing of students could be supported to create a long and positive learning experience among them.

"This meeting has been called to engage those who deal directly with students in various capacities so that we share experiences, challenges and strategies on how we can improve on our shortfalls," he explained. "Raising a child takes the whole community and that calls for concerted efforts from both the University and other stakeholders to produce exemplary graduates."

The Vice-Chancellor thanked the different sectors represented for the long history of cordial existence between students and the community, a fit he said should be generously safeguarded. He further stressed that, for Zomba to truly be realized as an admirable University City, it needs to have students that can be taken as role models, a goal that requires efforts from all members of the community.

He bemoaned the behavior of some members of the community who allow students to misrepresent the values and beliefs of the University by failing to make the students accountable for their ill behavior.

"As an institution of higher learning, we are willing to improve on the support we provide to our students. For example, we are introducing a student tutorship system in which staff members will be involved in mentoring students and being attendant to their concerns that would affect their stay at the University," the Vice-Chancellor said.

"Therefore we wish to use all the expertise available among ourselves to positively improve the community interaction with students including this initiative for community engagement," he stressed.

The meeting presented the University with an opportunity to address some deep-rooted recurrent and structural challenges like uncoordinated efforts between the institution and the community to offer a conducive learning environment for students. Participants also discussed other pressing needs such as students' security on the streets, student orientation, and students' loans.

The meeting proposed a number of remedies to improve student welfare.



*The MoU signing ceremony underway*

## UNIMA and BWB forge relationship

One of the features that make the University of Malawi to be a preferred higher education institution among many secondary school leavers in the region is the relationship that it forges with various organisations that represent the industry. These relationships ensure that the learning content offered at the university is aligned with industry needs. The latest in these relationships was established on 24th July 2023, when the University of Malawi signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Blantyre Water Board (BWB). This MoU establishes a mutually beneficial relationship between the two institutions, aiming to provide reciprocal assistance. The main objective of this mutual relationship is to enable UNIMA to offer technical support to BWB, including water quality analysis, research, and training in water-related matters. In return, BWB will support UNIMA by providing student attachments.

The signing ceremony took place at Blantyre Water Board premises. Present at the function were representatives from UNIMA, including the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Dr. Sunduzwayo Madise; the University Registrar, Mr. Martin Matululu; and the Executive Dean of the School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Professor Cosmo Ngongondo. The Department of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering Department was represented by Dr.

Timothy T. Biswick (Head of Department) and Dr. Margaret Maoni.

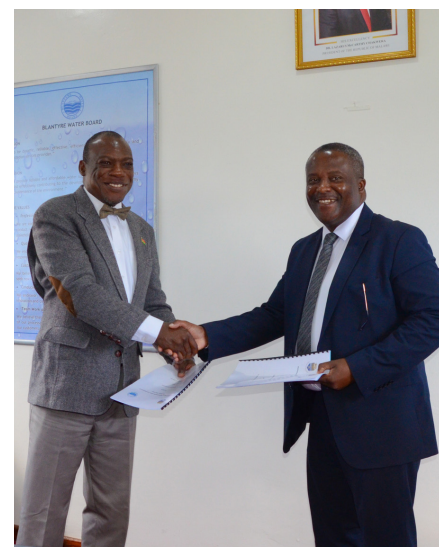
In his remarks, Dr. Sunduzwayo Madise, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Malawi, expressed his gratitude to the BWB team for their collaboration, as it marks a significant milestone in the journey of both institutions. He emphasized that the student industry attachments at BWB will provide invaluable opportunities for UNIMA chemistry students, enabling them to gain practical skills and real-world experience.

“The University of Malawi is well-prepared for this MoU, boasting expertise, highly sophisticated Chemistry laboratories, and staff ready to provide necessary assistance to BWB,” he said.

The Chief Executive Officer of Blantyre Water Board, Dr. Robert Hanjahanja, explained that this MoU with the University of Malawi (UNIMA) will be instrumental in assisting BWB to provide quality water to citizens. Through this agreement, BWB will have access to the facilities of UNIMA, where they can conduct water tests during times when they lack the necessary resources. Additionally, in cases of uncertain research, they can seek knowledge and advice from the experts at the University of Malawi.

Dr. Hanjahanja also pointed out that the MoU goes beyond providing industry attachments to 3rd and 4th-year Chemistry UNIMA students. BWB is committed to financially supporting outstanding female candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds in the field of science, covering their tuition fees, and offering opportunities to work with BWB after completing their studies.

The ceremony ended with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding.



*The UNIMA DVC and BWB CEO finalise the agreement with a handshake*



Respective Vice Chancellors of UNIMA and UNIRovuma, Prof. Samson Sajidu and Prof Mário Jorge Broto dos Santos

## UNIMA and University of Rovuma formalize partnership

In a ceremony loaded with expectation, the Universities of Malawi (UNIMA) and Rovuma (UniRovuma) formalized on Wednesday, 9th August, 2023 in the city of Lichinga, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which establishes the main lines for exchanges in different areas between the two higher education institutions. The MoU was initiated on the Campus of UniRovuma – Niassa Extension by the respective Vice-Chancellors, namely, Professors Samson Sajidu, from the University of Malawi and Mário Jorge Brito dos Santos, from the host institution.

The signing of the MoU paves way for the implementation of several joint projects,



UNIMA delegates on a tour of UNIRovuma

namely, international graduation and post-graduation programs, the training and qualification of the teaching staff and researchers in the agricultural, natural, biological, chemical, engineering, English language and accounting sciences.

Also included in the partnership are plans for the mobility of professors, students and administrative staff; research and joint publications and cultural and sports exchanges.

During the ceremony, Professor Samson Sajidu said that his institution is determined to offer joint degrees, increase the international mobility of professors and students, strengthen adherence to the international standards of university education. He vowed that UNIMA's partnership with UniRovuma is one that is bound to produce results that satisfy both institutions.

"Today is a significant milestone in the world of education, as we launch ourselves into a new direction of teaching and learning, student and faculty exchanges, research collaboration, and joint program development, among many other benefits that lie ahead," he remarked.

Professor Sajidu added that the signed MoU fits perfectly with his country's vision and the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan defined by his institution, which aim, among other points, to increase access to higher education.

"Signing this memorandum is not just a product, but a watershed for our two Universities and that is the source of our satisfaction," UNIMA's Vice-Chancellor emphasized.

During the ceremony, it was also announced that Professor Sajidu will travel to Rovuma University in Nampula for a visit at the invitation of Professor Brito dos Santos in October, 2023.

Taking his turn to speak, Professor Brito dos Santos observed that the signing of the MoU with UNIMA represents the beginning of a partnership that is intended to be fruitful for both institutions and that it will allow the implementation of joint projects in the areas of teaching, research, extension and university innovation.

He said the partnership will allow the two Universities to mutually strengthen each other, making use of the competences and strengths that each of these institutions presents.

## UNIMA VC attends 9th International Education Youth Forum

One of the strategies that the University of Malawi is aggressively pursuing as part of its internationalization drive is the engagement with various academics in the diaspora. This was one of the key messages that Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi, Professor Samson Sajidu, stressed during his speech as guest of honour at the 2023 International Youth Forum (IYF), in Busan, South Korea, which he attended from 16th to 23rd July, 2023.

The invitation of UNIMA's Vice Chancellor at one of the most prestigious global education fora demonstrates the institution's international recognition as an equal player in the provision of international higher education (IHE).

In his presentation, entitled "Internationalising our education system through exchange programmes: A case study of University of Malawi", Professor Sajidu further highlighted that most of the challenges faced by youth in Malawi may partly be attributed to lack of international exposure during their formal education years. He observed that limited international exposure, obtained largely through social media and television, is usually not a true representation of cultures in other countries.



*Prof. Sajidu engages with some of the presenters at IYF*

"In order to reap maximum benefits that add value to the core business of UNIMA from internationally exposed and experienced academics including Malawians in the diaspora, the University has developed strategies on engaging them to assist in areas like external examination moderation, participation in the organization of international workshops/seminars/meetings/conferences, short-

term teaching engagements, joint research and publishing, among others", Prof. Sajidu said.

He informed the audience that UNIMA has developed a framework in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to ease the mobility of students which includes systems for credit transfers from accredited and recognised institutions within the global village.

## Literary Studies scholar selected as Iso Lomso Fellow



*Dr Asante Lucy Mtenje*

Dr Asante Lucy Mtenje, an Associate Professor in the Department of Literary Studies, is currently at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS)

in South Africa for a residency as part of the Iso Lomso fellowship which she was awarded in 2022. She will be there until October, 2023. Mtenje, who is currently

sabbatical leave, will be working on a book project on the politics of gender, dress and sexuality in Malawian popular art during the residency. As part of her work, she is studying the representations of the *chitenje* (a wrap-around cloth) in Malawian popular arts, as a site for examining how questions of gender, sexuality, class, and national belonging are negotiated.

The Iso Lomso fellowship includes a three-year attachment to STIAS. During this time, fellows may spend a total of 10 months in residence at STIAS to develop and pursue a long-term research project. The Fellowship also provides funding to attend up to two international conferences or training workshops anywhere in the world.

Mtenje was one of seven candidates offered the prestigious fellowship as part of the 6th Cohort of Iso Lomso fellows in 2022.



*Dr. Chimbwete Phiri*

## Dr. Chimbwete Phiri appointed PS Ministry of Education (Basic Education)

At the University of Malawi, we always celebrate when one of our members of staff has been seconded to a government department. This is a tradition that is as old as the University itself. Every now and then, a member of staff is summoned to serve, always at a senior level, at a government section. It is a gesture that speaks volumes about government's recognition of the expertise that is kept at the university.

In this vein, the Office of the President and Cabinet, in August 2023, appointed Dr. Rachael Chimbwete Phiri, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Malawi, as Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Education (Basic Education). Dr. Chimbwete Phiri has over 18 years of experience at UNIMA, a period during which she has served in some leadership profiles. She is therefore a valuable addition to the Ministry.

Speaking about her appointment, Dr. Chimbwete Phiri expresses ambivalent

feelings. While seeing the position as a challenge, she is more than prepared to overcome it. "I am very excited that I have an opportunity to contribute towards attaining the national development agenda through the education sector and I feel greatly honoured to be part of the management and decision-making processes for such a big sector," she said. "In whatever I do whether in the office or afield, I have an obligation to the ordinary Malawian child out there who must be taken through a transformative system of education.

As Principal Secretary (Basic Education), she will give policy direction in all matters of basic education. She will also be responsible for coordinating all activities pertaining to primary education, complementary basic education, all the way to primary school teacher training and development. Simply put, I need to be sure that the learner is in class and learning;

teaching is taking place; the teacher has the resources they need; and all systems of managing these core functions are in place and functioning effectively," the Principal Secretary stressed.

Having hit the ground running, the new Principal Secretary has already observed some areas that need attention, such as the dwindling standard of education in all the education subsectors, the low levels of literacy and numeracy skills among learners, and the inadequacy of resources to recruit graduates from teacher training centres (TTCs). To tackle these issues, among other things, she aims to engage with her counterparts in the Ministry of Education to work on improving the teacher-pupil ratio, to increase the quality of teaching through training and other teacher development activities, and to increase ways of motivating teachers.

We wish Dr. Rachael Chimbwete Phiri all the best.





Attendees at Prof. Kaime's lecture

## Scholar supports transforming legal education

In the past few months, the University of Malawi has seen a number of eminent scholars who have returned to their alma mater to present public lectures and seminar talks at the campus in Zomba. This has proven to be beneficial for the students, as they become equipped with knowledge and skills that prepare them to enter the industry and bring about effective change in the real world.

The School of Law, Economics, and Government's Private Law department had the honor of hosting Professor Thoko Kaime from the University of Bayreuth in



Prof. Thoko Kaime

Germany on August 18th, 2023. During the event, Professor Kaime presented a research talk titled "Imagining the law school of the Future".

In his presentation, Professor Kaime focused on several key pillars: teaching, research, network, and advocacy, which are crucial for transforming the law school. He stressed that the modern law school must move away from the illusory objectivity of legal norms held by lawyers. Professor Kaime observed that the legal field tends to be conservative, oriented towards preserving established power dynamics, yet it possesses the potential to drive positive societal changes. Furthermore, he highlighted the necessity for the law school to undergo self-transformation in order to become interdisciplinary, student-centered, flexible, international, open, and critical.

Professor Kaime went on to explain that in this digital era, the law school should leverage technology to create expansive classrooms, thus accommodating and exposing students to diverse institutions, including international ones. "This approach would empower students to access resources well beyond their local environment," he said. He further emphasized the importance of strategic collaborations, advocating for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching that makes legal concepts comprehensible to various fields, such as accounting. He also

stressed the need for ongoing evaluation of programs and curricula.

The presenter ended his talk by reiterating the significance of the law school having a distinct identity, centered around promoting social justice. He further pointed out the importance of deliberate networking choices for the law school's future, suggesting a prioritization of local connections. Professor Kaime commended the law department for its existing law clinic and urged the school to brainstorm ways to enhance its effectiveness.

Students who attended the lecture voiced their appreciation for the event. "The research talk was very insightful. I have learned that it is possible for a law school curriculum to be student-friendly if the lecturers are willing to assess their own performance through positive feedback from the students," said Rashiedah Wineshi, a fourth-year student. "This will make learning very interesting and will assist in improving the delivery of the modules."

The function concluded with words of gratitude from Dr. Bernadette Malunga, the Head of the Department of Private Law. The discussion captured the interest of both students and staff, and also included virtual participation from some attendees who commended its stimulating and insightful nature.



*The UNIMA team poses with their hosts from University of Maryland*

## Law students visit Maryland in academic exchange programme

Following a visit by scholars from the University of Maryland to the University of Malawi in May this year, a delegation of staff and students from UNIMA reciprocated the visit in August. The group comprised of Leader of the Delegation, Mr Chikosa Banda, fellow lecturer and Manager of Legal Clinic Alexious Kamangila, and a group of 12 students. The visit lasted for 2 weeks.

The group travelled to the United States as a continuation of an ongoing memorandum of understanding between the University of Malawi and the University of Maryland. Among other things, the agreement sees the two institutions sharing knowledge in the areas of Environmental Justice, Human Rights and Public Health.

Banda pointed out that there have been many benefits realized from the trip. “One of the main lessons drawn from the visit is that effective regulation is key to promoting environmental justice, human rights and public health, even in resource constrained countries like Malawi,” he said. “The students have learnt that, as future lawyers, they play a critical role in promoting sustainable development and intergenerational equity”.

One of the locations visited by the group include Chesapeake Bay, a biodiversity hotspot. The students appreciated how the

lawyers at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation use legal instruments to protect the environment and to conserve nature.

The team also had a tour of the White House, the National Mall, the National African American Museum, the Capitol and the Supreme Court of America, in order to understand the Constitutional Structure of the US both from a historical and contemporary perspective, as well as the implications of the US governance structure for Environmental Justice, Human Rights and Public Health.

The students also visited the Maryland Aquarium and the Smithsonian Museum of Arts in Washington.

Their final visit was to the Environmental Integrity Project, an environmental non-profit organisation that advocates for environmental law and policy reforms and engages in public interest litigation targeting the pervasive problems of pollution in the United States.

Apart from these visits, the students attended various classes, depending on their interests. These include classes on Environmental Law and Constitutional Law. They were also given the opportunity to present their dissertations before senior academics. The staff members also presented papers. Leader of the delegation,

Chikosa Banda, presented a paper at an anchor event. The paper was entitled “Extreme Weather Events and Climate Justice in Malawi: Limits of the Existing Legal Framework?”. Mr Kamangila also made some remarks on the potential role of legal clinics in addressing problems of climate justice in resource poor countries.

One of the students who went on the trip, Mukeya Chirwa, pointed out that the UNIMA students have benefited a lot from it. “The trip for us as UNIMA students represents an opportunity to learn from one of the oldest law schools in the world, especially with regard to how they conduct clinical work,” he said. “It also provides an opportunity to dive deeper into issues of climate change and public health. At the same time, we have given our colleagues at the University of Maryland a chance to see how the effects of climate change disproportionately affect the poor of Malawi.”

As part of the MoU between UNIMA and the University of Maryland, there are plans to engage in other activities such as joint class instruction, research and training programmes, faculty cooperation and exchange, student exchange, joint organisation and sponsorship of conferences, and joint publications.

# SLEG awards postgraduate students



*Executive Dean, Prof. Happy Kayuni awards a certificate to one of the students, with Acting Postgraduate Dean, Dr. Edister Jamu, present*

The University of Malawi continues to recognize top-performing undergraduate and postgraduate students pursuing various programs. On 21 July 2023, the School of Law, Economics, and Government (SLEG) celebrated its 15 postgraduate students who excelled in their coursework, publications, and thesis writing.

During the opening of the ceremony, Professor Happy Kayuni, the Executive Dean of the School of Law, Economics, and Government, congratulated all the awardees. As he handed certificates of excellence to the awardees, Prof. Kayuni applauded their achievements, stressing that they demonstrated the commitment and dedication that enabled them to complete their studies at the University.

“The ceremony is very crucial to our university as it serves to inspire and motivate prospective and current students pursuing their degrees. It shows that it is indeed possible to complete postgraduate studies at UNIMA within the exact 2-year period,” he said.

The Guest of Honour, Dr. Edister Jamu (Acting Postgraduate Dean), also expressed his immense joy for the awardees and their massive milestones. He further mentioned that the ceremony is a testament to the

strides that the university and SLEG are accomplishing in postgraduate programs. He emphasized that the criteria used to award these excellence certificates truly demonstrate the hard work put forth by the recipients. Lastly, he encouraged current students pursuing various postgraduate programs to work extra hard to be part of the celebrated students in the coming years.

The ceremony brought joy to the awardees as they completed their studies within the expected timeframe. Ms. Tughulupi Ndovi,

a representative for the awardees, expressed her gratitude to the Executive Dean and all members of staff for their unwavering encouragement and support throughout their postgraduate journey. She further commended her fellow awardees for their teamwork spirit, which assisted them in scoring good grades.

At the end of the ceremony, the awardees were honored with excellence awards in various categories. The ceremony attracted many members of staff and families of the awardees who were present to celebrate with them.



*Award recipients pose with SLEG staff*

## Kasulu attends UKZN Philosophy Symposium



*Mr Manuel Kasulu*

At some point in their career at the University of Malawi, every academic must present their research ideas before an audience. The institution encourages its staff to attend conferences, whether locally or abroad, where they are able to share their ideas with others. It is no wonder then that Mr Manuel Kasulu from the Department of Philosophy was part of a group that met at University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's UNITE Conference Centre from 15th to 16th July, 2023, to participate in the 2023 South African Postgraduate Philosophy Symposium. The symposium was hosted by the Philosophy Department within the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at UKZN.

At the symposium, Kasulu presented a paper titled "The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: Can Learning Machines be Moral Agents?" In his talk, he explored the problem of moral responsibility in artificial intelligence, particularly in situations where the actions of learning and autonomous machines cause harm to human beings.

The symposium was intended to provide a forum for postgraduate philosophers from various institutions to present their research, exchange ideas, and form connections. It brought together postgraduate students within the field of Philosophy from different tertiary institutions across Southern Africa.

## Scholars discuss solutions to Africa's food insecurity

Life at an academic institution often involves seminars where intellectual discourse is carried out, with scholars debating various ideas that they have been working on in private. It is often beneficial when such discussions have an overt utility for society, beyond being theoretical. That was the nature of the Food Security in Africa seminar held on 30th August, 2023 in the Little Theatre at the University of Malawi.

The event attracted 70 participants from diverse disciplines with the goal of discussing possible means of eliminating food insecurity. Apart from the University of Malawi, the function attracted participants from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda. They included representatives from the academy as well as government institutions.

According to Dr Dorothy Tembo, Team Leader of the organising committee of the seminar, the forum was an offshoot of her research in the intersection of food, religion and culture, which she is undertaking as a research fellow at Future Africa, University of Pretoria. Dr Tembo collaborated with some other

colleagues at the University of Malawi to organise the interdisciplinary seminar. This was done to ensure that the seminar would feature a comprehensive understanding of factors affecting food security beyond religion and culture.

"Through this platform, we aimed to create a space where scholars, researchers, and stakeholders could meet and discuss factors that affect food security," Dr. Tembo said. "Our ultimate objective was to promote research that addresses the needs of people in their concrete environment, given that Malawi is a chronic food-insecure country."

The seminar featured presentations on a variety of topics related to the main theme. Presenters talked about the relationship between food security and climate, human coexistence with the ecosystem, land rights and climate vulnerability, among other topics.

With this being the first event of its kind, there are plans to continue the tradition and involve stakeholders at every step of the planning and implementation process, so that future events are even better.



*Members of the audience making contributions during the seminar*

# GES Scholar awarded University of Dundee's Doctoral Fellowship



*Mrs. Colleen Mbughi Makunganya*

The University of Malawi has, over the years, forged relationships with various international universities, significantly creating opportunities for both students and lecturers on their academic journey. In 2022, leaders from the seven public universities in Malawi came together to establish an academic partnership with the University of Dundee, located in the United Kingdom.

The partnership has already opened up an opportunity for Mrs. Colleen Mbughi Makunganya, a lecturer in the Geography and Earth Sciences Department in the School of Natural and Applied Sciences. Mrs. Mbughi Makunganya is one of the three successful Malawian awardees in the first cohort of the multi-million-pound Doctoral Fellowship scheme. This program aims to bring African researchers to the University of Dundee to complete their studies. The scheme represents a commitment to fund 25 PhD positions for candidates across Africa over the course of ten years, with a particular emphasis on projects aimed at addressing issues within the continent.

In an interview with Mrs. Mbughi Makunganya, she expressed her excitement

at being one of the five chosen candidates from across Africa, with three hailing from Malawi. She further emphasized that this opportunity would enrich her network and expose her to various experts in her field of study from different parts of the world. These interactions will help her gain skills, experiences, and knowledge that will significantly advance her career.

The awardee expressed gratitude for the opportunity. "This chance will enable me to acquire and enhance my knowledge and skills in research and the field of Physical Geography. It will not only develop my personal capacity but also have a multiplier effect by allowing me to share the knowledge I gain with my students and the research community at the University," she said.

Mrs. Mbughi Makunganya is expected to begin her doctoral studies at Dundee University this year. Her research will concentrate on the impact of land use and land cover change on livelihoods in Malawi, with a specific emphasis on the effect of deforestation on landscape and livelihood challenges for young people in forest-based communities.

"Currently, there are few experts in most areas of Physical Geography in Malawi, in particular land use and land cover changes, yet the need for these experts is crucial to Malawi's development agenda and indeed in other countries. For instance, challenges that are posed by transformations in land cover such as caused by deforestation, which includes, loss of soil fertility, flooding, climate change and variability, landslides, among others, have serious implications on agriculture and sustainable development in general. All these problems are barriers to the achievement of Malawi 2063 which aims at transforming Malawi into a youth-centric, inclusive, and self-reliant industrialized upper middle-income country."

"The training opportunity at University of Dundee offers me an excellent chance to enhance my knowledge and research skills in the field of Physical Geography, specifically focusing on land use and land cover change. This will enable me to make a meaningful contribution to Malawi's development priorities," she expressed with enthusiasm.

# UNIMA's innovations stand out at GCM Launch



*UNIMA exhibits its innovations at the function*

On August 30, 2023, the University of Malawi was one of six public universities in Malawi showcasing various innovations at the Bingu International Convention Centre in Lilongwe (BICC). The National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) provided a platform for these universities to display their innovations during the Grand Challenges Malawi (GCM) launch, held under the theme

“Unlocking Strategic Investments through Collaborative Research.” The Grand Challenges prioritize funding opportunities for high-level, quality ideas from researchers and innovators with exciting, groundbreaking research projects.

The UNIMA team comprised four staff members, namely Mr. Vincent Peheliwa, Mr. Masauko Utila, Mr. Thesaurus Charles

Namelo, and Mr Hardwell Sauteni from the School of Natural and Applied Sciences' Physics department. They showcased some of their innovations during the GCM launch, including a Standalone Photovoltaic system, an incubator, and the Beekee Box Digital Library, among others.

The UNIMA team's innovations attracted several prominent individuals who were amazed by them. Among these admirers was the renowned entrepreneur Dr. Napoleon Dzombe. He praised the team for their captivating work and recommended one of the best battery innovators in Malawi to collaborate with the team to further enhance the Standalone Photovoltaic system whose operation he witnessed.

During the exhibition, Honorable Madalitso Kambauwa Wirima, Minister of Education, was thoroughly impressed by the innovations presented by the UNIMA team. She commended the team for their excellent and magnificent innovative work. She further encouraged the team to continue creating innovations, as these will not only assist in the education sector but also enhance the economy of Malawi and address the most critical challenges in Malawi and Africa.

## Macheso attends University of Iowa Writing Program

Dr Wesley Macheso, who is the Head of the Department of Literary Studies, has been awarded a writing residency at the University of Iowa under the International Writing Program (IWP). The IWP hosts the oldest and largest multinational writing program in the world, which is now in its 56th year. The program seeks to enhance the professional development of writers and writers' trainers by advancing their knowledge of creative writing, literature, and publishing, while strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration.

Macheso will join 34 other writers from across the world on this program.

Dr Macheso, who also teaches Creative Writing at UNIMA, is a well-known columnist and creative writer in Malawi. He is the author of “The Write Stuff” column in *The Daily Times* newspaper. He won the Peer Gynt Literary Award for his children's book *Akuzike and the Gods* in 2017, and has been twice shortlisted for the Miles Morland Writing Scholarship and long-listed for the 2015 Short Story Day Africa Prize. He also the author of *A Masquerade of Spirits* (2020), a poetry collection.



*Dr. Wesley Macheso*



*Social work scholars pose for a picture*

## UNIMA Students Engage with International Social Work Experts

One of the fascinating opportunities that students who pass through the corridors of the University of Malawi encounter during their academic tenure and after their undergraduate studies is the chance to interact with and learn from experts and professors hailing from various international universities.

On August 15th, 2023, students from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, specifically under the Department of Sociology and Population Studies, engaged in an insightful interaction with visitors from such institutions. They had the privilege to converse with Professor Janet Walker from the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom and Dr

Michael Rasell from the University of Innsbruck in Austria. The event attracted the participation of 41 Social Work (SW) students. Among these, 15 students attended the interaction virtually.

During the interactions with students and alumni, Professor Walker and Dr Rasell shared their experience with the attendees.

They also conducted presentations covering a variety of topics, such as 'Contextual Safeguarding on Child Protection' and 'Social Perspectives on Disability and Mental Health'. The session concluded with current students and alumni exchanging their experiences within the social work sector.

"It's a privilege to work, learn, and share experiences with UNIMA students who are committed to serving vulnerable people," stated Walker. "This collaboration will bring forth opportunities that not only expand horizons but also establish networks for students to explore diverse perspectives on social work from international universities."

The Executive Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr Emmanuel Ngwira, extended his gratitude to Walker and Rasell for their visit to UNIMA, acknowledging that their presence establishes a connection that holds potential for collaborative efforts. He emphasized the School's unwavering dedication to promoting the field of social work in Malawi. Additionally, he shared the School's ongoing endeavors to introduce postgraduate social work programs aimed at elevating professional growth and making practical contributions to the expansion of the social work sector in Malawi.

The collaboration with the scholars began 10 years ago, and in an effort to strengthen social work in Malawi, Walker and Rasell visit UNIMA every year through a charity initiative called Supporting Social Work in Malawi (SSWIM), which is based in the United Kingdom.



*Dr Michael Rasell engages with students*

## UNIMA student emerges winner in essay writing competition



*Julius Mundewele Banda*

One of the features that often set University of Malawi students apart from the rest is their ability to articulate ideas in essays that astound others both globally and locally. Regardless of the programme of study they are pursuing, students at the university are able to craft well-argued papers where they display mastery of the English language, while discoursing in any topic at hand. Julius Mundewele

Banda, a fourth-year Bachelor of Education student majoring in Chemistry at UNIMA, recently displayed this attribute when, on July 31, 2023, he emerged national winner of an essay writing competition organized by the Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS) in collaboration with the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) and AMC Group Africa. This was the 10th ARSO Continental Essay Competition, and was held under the theme of “The Role of Standardization in Promoting the Growth of Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises for Sustainable, Inclusive, and Diversified Industrial and Economic Development in Africa”.

The competition was open to all accredited college and university students in Malawi and across all African countries. The competition aimed to have three categories of winners: National, Regional, and Continental, each with three positions. In the competition, participants were expected to submit an essay with 1200 words in line with the theme. In Malawi, all submitted essays were evaluated by

four judges drawn from Mzuzu University, Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS), National Bank of Malawi, and the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Development Institute (SMEDI).

During the prize presentation ceremony, at Crossroads Hotel in Blantyre, Banda pointed out that the writing and research skills he has acquired at the University of Malawi set him apart from the other 56 participants. This helped him to ensure that, in his essay, he organized his points carefully, ensuring a smooth and logical flow. Furthermore, he conducted thorough research on previously published scholarly works related to the competition's theme. This research greatly helped him align his writing with the theme, resulting in an essay that impressed the judges.

As a result of his outstanding performance, Banda received an award package that included a certificate signed by the MBS General Director, Dr Bernard Thole, a medal, and a cash prize of K250,000.00.

## Chimwaza pens winning SADC essay



*Viveck Chimwaza*

Barely weeks after a student from the University of Malawi won the Malawi Bureau of Standards Essay Writing Competition, the university has an added reason to celebrate as yet another student has displayed excellence in writing, emerging as the winner of the 2023 SADC Tertiary Institution Essay Competition. Viveck Chimwaza, a 4th year Bachelor of Arts (Humanities) student, was announced as the winner on 17th August, 2023, at the official ceremony of the 43rd Summit of Heads

and Government, which was held in Luanda, Angola.

The competition was announced in November, 2022, and called upon students from tertiary institutions within the SADC region to submit essays. Upon reading about the competition on the university website, Chimwaza put pen to paper and developed a persuasive argument detailing the merits of belonging to a regional body such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC). He structured his essay around three poles: the contribution

of SADC's forefathers to the regional integration agenda, the improvement in relationships among Southern African countries, and propositions for furthering the integration agenda, involving every member of the region. The impassioned essay displayed accurate knowledge of the history of SADC, the roles of its founders, its objectives, as well as the legacy of the founders. The young writer points out that one of the things that gave him an edge in his writing was the fact he researched for his essay, and drew upon his knowledge of creative writing.

Having emerged as the winner, Chimwaza shall receive the prize of USD2000. He points out that he feels humbled but also motivated to face any academic and professional challenge. “The win is yet more proof of the universally competitive products of UNIMA,” a jubilant Chimwaza said. He encourages his fellow to develop a positive mindset towards competitions of this nature, to bear in mind that UNIMA offers them the skills they need to succeed.

In the year 2023 so far, students from the University of Malawi have performed impressively in various competitions, within the continent and internationally.





*The Law students on their return home*

## Students applauded for excellence at global moot

Students from the University of Malawi recently participated the 15th Nelson Mandela World Human Rights Moot Court Competition, which took place at Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The UNIMA team was comprised of two students from the Department of Public Law and Clinical Legal Education in the School of Law, Economics, and Government, namely Mr. Bentry Nyondo, a 3rd year student and Miss Teuka Tembo, a 4th year student. UNIMA was among the top sixteen universities in Africa that qualified for the competition.

The competition began with fifty universities qualifying following the submission of written arguments. While in Geneva, the UNIMA team excelled in the advanced rounds and proceeded up to the Round 16.

On 24th July 2023, the University of Malawi welcomed Mr. Nyondo and Miss Tembo at Chileka Airport in Blantyre after their participation in the World Human Rights Moot competition. In an interview with Nyondo, he highlighted that their performance in the competition was excellent, and they were honored to moot against some of the best law students globally. He further explained that their success in the moot is a vindication of the rigorous and serious legal education and advocacy training provided by UNIMA.

“The Geneva experience provided us with a great networking opportunity with some of the towering figures in the legal profession on a global level,” he said.

Dr. Enoch Chilemba, Senior Law lecturer and faculty representative who escorted the students, applauded the team for their outstanding performance throughout the competition. He further highlighted that the students’ performance at the competition clearly shows that the university provides quality education to its students.

Professor Happy Kayuni, the Executive Dean of the School of Law, Economics, and

Government, congratulated Mr. Nyondo and Miss Tembo for their outstanding performance at the Competition. He further explained that, as a University, they are fully convinced that the programs being delivered are of a high standard both locally and internationally.

The Nelson Mandela World Human Rights Moot Court Competition is an annual and global competition that brings together universities from all five United Nations’ regions to argue a given hypothetical case. The Moot Court is organized by the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria.



*UNIMA's welcoming delegation poses with the students*

# UNIMA Staff in Fun Walk



*The VC leads UNIMA staff on the walk*

As one way of fostering a healthy relationship among staff at the University of Malawi, the University of Malawi Staff Sports Association (UMSSA) organized a fun walk on July 28th, 2023. The fun walk covered a distance of 12km, starting from the University Office in Zomba City and ending at Songani, a popular trading centre outside the city.

The activity was led by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Samson Sajidu, who was joined by over 80 staff members from various departments. These participants represented different sections of UNIMA,

including management, academics, accountants, librarians, and others.

In an interview with Professor Sajidu, he expressed his excitement about the exercise and stressed that it served two functions: promoting individuals' health and well-being, and enhancing the bond between the management and staff in both support and academic categories. He noted, for example, that the University employs over 500 support staff, many of whom are not acquainted with each other. Therefore, the exercise played a significant role in facilitating interaction and familiarity

among staff.

The Vice Chancellor further pointed out that by participating in such activities, both the management and staff could improve their health, thereby contributing to the overall success of the institution, since people who enjoy good health would also be able to contribute optimally to the university. Additionally, he proposed that the exercise should be conducted once every month to consistently promote the fitness of the staff.

The Chairperson of UMSSA, Martin Likongwe, who is also a Food and Nutrition lecturer, explained that while staff members are typically engaged in various sports activities, the association decided to introduce a walking exercise to accommodate those who are not involved in sports.

“The fun walk was organized to promote camaraderie among staff members and enhance positive working relationships,” Likongwe stated. “A fun walk provides a platform for people to socialize and interact while exercising.”

Many of the participants expressed satisfaction with the exercise, and look forward to more of such activities in the future.

## UNIMA receives tennis equipment

At the University of Malawi, the aim is not just to develop the intellectual capacity of students and other researchers. The institution also recognizes the importance of health, well-being, and fitness for its students and staff members. As such, the university encourages its members to actively participate in various sports activities.

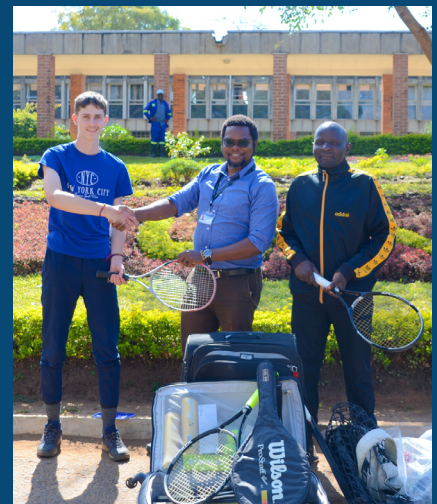
In line with this emphasis of sports, on 19th July, 2023, the University of Malawi received a donation of tennis equipment from Mr. Harvey Clay on behalf of his school, Aylesbury Grammar School from the United Kingdom. The equipment included tennis rackets, balls, nets and attire for the players. Representing the university during the donation ceremony was Mr. Kumvenji Lamba, the Assistant Registrar (Administration).

In an interview with Mr. Clay, he mentioned that he is part of the tennis club at his school. He considered bringing over some equipment of his favorite sport to donate to the University of Malawi, having recognized it as one of the few universities in Malawi that owns a tennis court and participates in tennis. He further explained that his visit to Malawi is part of their school exchange program.

During the donation of the tennis equipment and rackets, Mr. Lamba expressed his gratitude to Clay for considering UNIMA as a beneficiary of the tennis equipment. He pointed out that the university now possesses enough tennis equipment, which will enable the students and staff members to train and participate more actively in this sport discipline.

The students and staff members of the University of Malawi have participated in

various sports disciplines competitions nationally and in the region, consistently winning most of them.



*Mr Kumvenji Lamba receives the equipment from Mr Harvey Clay*

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS



In the past two-month period, there are a number of events that have been happening.

The most positive announcement has been that of university selection in July. This was good news to many who will soon be joining our corridors.

Unfortunately, we also lost some loved ones during this period.

We offer words of condolence to Mr Henry Macheso from the Special Needs section, on the passing of his mother.

The University of Malawi also lost Mr. Thokozani Bezai, a student who had just who has just completed his studies with UNIMA. May he rest in peace.